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Mr. Walton

MR. WALTON

AND

MR. TRACY.

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Mr. Walton and Mr. Tracy.

"Well, Mr. Walton, I was brought up in an orthodox church, I attend regularly and listen respectfully; but I must say that I have great doubts about the truth of the doctrine which I hear preached. I go to services with my family, because my father, in his life-time, went to the same services with his family."

The speaker was about thirty-five years of age; a tradesman of great industry and unblemished reputation. Mr. Walton was somewhat older; and he bore in his tone and manner the marks of more general education than his companion, to whom he replied calmly: "What do you doubt, Mr. Tracy?"

"I doubt," said the other, "the whole doctrine that I hear about a judgment to come, which shall separate all mankind into two classes, the saved and the lost. My reason is this. I look around the congregation to which I belong, and the people with whom I do business every day.

I know that they generally have good intentions. They try to do their duty. So do I myself. But the preachers tell us that this will not avail for salvation. They say that a man must believe certain doctrines and go through certain kinds of feelings; or else he is unconverted and cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Now I know well some men who profess to have been converted, and I know well other men, who make no claims to religious character; and some of the last are, I think, better men than the first. Do not suppose that I mean to represent the religious men as insincere in their religion. They are good men in their way; but other men, who do not profess to have been born again, are, in my opinion, at least as good; and I do not believe that our Maker and Judge will separate mankind, after death, into two classes, one for punishment and the other for happiness, unless there is a very great and plain difference between the classes."

"There you are certainly quite right," said Mr. Walton. "I mean," he continued, "that we may be sure that the awards of the last day will be *plainly just judgment*, even in the eyes of those who are condemned. We are told throughout the Scriptures that one great end and object of judgment after death is to clear up what

seems wrong in this world and to justify God's ways to man. Now, either what you call orthodox doctrine must be somewhat erroneous, or else you misunderstand it. You say in effect that the preaching which you hear represents that mankind will be separated in the day of judgment, not by a plain rule of justice, but by a secret, mysterious rule, which absolute divine power will enforce. But man's conscience cannot approve such a rule, because, although it may be just when it is understood, it is now, and probably will, even in the next life, be above the reach of human understanding. Therefore, what you call orthodox doctrine does not convey to your mind a just view of the principles on which the world shall be judged. Perhaps preachers generally misstate the rule of Scripture; or they may add something to it, or take away something from it, and so turn truth into error and make darkness out of light. They are not inspired men; and you should remember that a man may undertake to teach others and yet be very much in the dark himself, but for all that not be a hypocrite. On this point Scripture is very clear. Take the case of Job. He fell into great affliction. Three of his friends, very devout men in their way, heard of his misery. They consulted together and agreed in the con-

clusion that he was under great judgments, because he had fallen into great sins. Those sins might be, and indeed they were, secret sins (they said), but the Lord had searched them out and was now punishing the man of Uz for his guilt above other men. They accordingly made an appointment to condole with him and to exhort him to repentance. This they did; first weeping with him, and then freely interpreting for him the ways of Providence. In other words, they undertook to declare to him authoritatively why the Almighty had singled him out for peculiar sorrows. They were eloquent and apparently devout in their addresses; they dwelt largely and approvingly upon the judgments of God, in language which is now often quoted as inspired; they unanimously declared that Job had been visited by such judgments: and yet, at the last, the Almighty Himself rebuked them, because they had not spoken right things of Him as His servant Job had done. It appears that they did not at all understand God's rule of judgment, in His dealings with men, during this life; and it may very well be that a great many of our preachers and religious writers make just as great mistakes about the rule of judgment under which men shall pass after death. Why may it not be so?"

"What you say is very fair and candid on your part, as a member of the church," replied Mr. Tracy; "but unfortunately I find that the Scriptures seem to sanction the arbitrary rule, which the preachers lay down. I do not profess to have studied all their teachings as carefully as I might have done, but I have read them enough to know that there is a general rule for the separation of mankind, at the day of judgment, into two classes. That rule appears to me hard and unreasonable; and indeed I cannot conceive of any rule, of extensive application, which would appear reasonable, for I cannot help thinking that there must be little difference in character between the worst man in heaven and the best man in hell. The whole doctrine of judgment and separation into two classes, one for salvation the other for misery, is one that I cannot receive. To be honest and plain, it is there that I stumble. The Scriptures begin with a foundation on which I cannot build. It is dreadful to consider this life as the Scriptures represent it. We live here, on the whole, pleasantly, doing our duty to our families and to the community, as a general thing; most of us are not altogether unmindful of duty towards God; and what is at the end of this life, according to the Scriptures? Simply eternal judgment—se-

paration according to some divine rule which will discriminate amongst those who, in this life, have seemed to man's judgment to be pretty much alike in regard to moral character. This is the great mystery of revelation. I cannot believe that God made such a weak creature as man subject to such an alternative as endless misery. If the ground of condemnation were gross and plain in the Scriptures, the difficulty of believing would be greatly diminished. But the ground is obscure—too obscure for me to understand how man can, with reason, be condemned upon it."

"Well," said Mr. Walton, "since you find difficulty in the Scriptures on this point, suppose that we for a time put them aside, as authority for the rule of judgment, and consider the world as it would seem to be, if it were conceded on all hands that there was no revelation of a rule for the judgment of God on men after death. It is plain enough that there is a good deal of crime in the world. Penitentiaries, capital punishments and other contrivances to restrain men from following evil passions to extremity, show clearly that a man, in the very prime and vigor of his days, may be dreadfully depraved, so bad in fact that he cannot be let loose upon other men. Such a man must be confined, or else he will do grie-

vous harm to others : and in the case of some offenders, the law goes further and says in effect : 'the mischief to which these men incline is so extreme, that they must be put out of this world, in which it is possible for them to do such mischief.' Let us suppose then that men thus wedded to crime undergo the penalty of the law, and that they die as they have lived, hardened criminals. What change do you suppose, that death—the mere act of dying, of passing from the world of flesh into the world of spirits,—makes in their moral characters? Do you think that they leave their wickedness behind them in their vile bodies, and that their spirits pass into another state of existence, pure, upright and docile?—as if they were the spirits of children, born into a new life. Did you ever hear of a people, ancient or modern, in the heathen world, who believed that death is such a sort of cleansing flood, into which all spirits alike are plunged, in order to wash out all the stains of this life? And indeed are you not, on your own conscience and honor, bound to acknowledge, that such men as I have just described are a standing mystery in this world? They use this life for evil; they pass out of it without change. We do not believe—they do not themselves believe—that they perish, as the brutes do, in death. Our moral

sense will not permit us to assume that death, of itself, discharges their sins, changes their natures and makes them fit for happiness in the life beyond the grave. We feel quite sure of the contrary. We know that there is a judge; and we are well persuaded that such souls must come under judgment. Indeed, the assurance of such judgment is necessary for our contentment during the present life. Suppose that we were not so assured by our own hearts: or (what would be still stronger) suppose that there came to us a revelation, declaring exactly the contrary, and teaching us that the world beyond the grave is a vast kingdom where judgment against the crimes of this life is unknown, how should we regard that world of spirits? Would it not to our apprehensions be simply a region of spiritual anarchy, the abode of unchecked evil, a place of destination most horrible for us all?"

"A very good argument, that," rejoined Mr. Tracy, "for judgment in the next world against clear cases of great wrong-doing in this life; but we are not, as I understand the matter, considering instances of hardened criminals, or even of notorious evil livers. We are discussing the doctrine of Scripture, in regard to separation amongst those who have lived reputably, and, I may say, very conscientiously: and I ask again,

'Why is one person of the well-intentioned class taken and another left?'"

"You are quite mistaken," replied Mr. Walton, "in saying that we are now engaged in discussing the doctrine or rule *of Scripture* in regard to the separation of men into two classes after death. You averred, at the outset, that the objections to that rule are insuperable. I therefore agreed to put that rule, or in other words revelation, aside, in our discussion, and to consider what light natural religion offers in regard to separation of the good and the evil in the world beyond the grave. In effect, my intention is to decline, at present, to defend the scriptural rule of judgment, in which I believe, and to require you to define a more satisfactory rule of judgment, under the guidance of natural religion, which, as an unbeliever in revelation, is what you must fall back upon."

"You have no right to put me upon such a task," said Mr. Tracy.

"Yes, I have," replied Mr. Walton. "In matters of high practical concern, he who not only criticises, but rejects the rules and remedies which others have put forth for public advantage, must himself be prepared to show a more excellent way. Failing to do so, he will be esteemed a mere controversialist, or factious obstructionist.

As an illustration, let me cite the administration of government in Great Britain. The ministry of that country is present in Parliament, to unfold its measures for the public good and to defend them. The members on the opposition-benches may criticise those measures and so defeat them. When the defeated bills are of high importance, the ministers accept their defeat as a declaration of want of confidence in their policy; and the Sovereign then calls on the opposition-members to form a new administration on their own principles. It is taken for granted that they have some principles of their own, on which they will undertake to govern the country; (their opposition to the previous administration had weight on that ground, and on that ground only)—and if, on being themselves called to office, they cannot propose at least plausible substitutes for the measures which they lately criticised and defeated, they become obnoxious, as mere political controversialists. Government requires something more than controversy for its administration: and the religion of every man who puts Christianity aside, ought to be something more than a mere denial of the doctrines of revelation. There ought to be some plausible substitute for what is rejected, especially in respect to such a momentous point as the rule of

judgment after death. For in our bosoms conscience is, as it were, the Sovereign, and she in effect says: 'human passions are kept in restraint by the apprehension of what may come after death:' and as moral order, in her realm, is thus dependent on *belief of some kind*, she must hold him to be a wanton disturber of religious peace, who overturns a severe but intelligible rule of judgment, without offering some other rule as a substitute."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said Mr. Tracy, thoughtfully.

"I am glad to hear you make that admission," rejoined Mr. Walton; "and now, my friend, I turn the tables on you and inquire, what is the difference between the worst man in *your* heaven and the best man in *your* hell? You have admitted that some must be excluded from the company of the blessed. You cannot hold that the only persons to be thus abandoned to perdition are those whom we call criminals, or, in other words, persons whose crimes have been detected and punished in this life. We all know that some of the worst men in this world, at all times, are smiling, prosperous villains; and that the instigators of great crimes often escape, whilst their tools perish miserably. We know, too, that many men, of apparently reputable lives,

are considered by all their acquaintance so entirely destitute of conscience, that they are believed to be willing to take any thing that the law allows. We see these wealthy and stealthy robbers of the poor and helpless fenced about and made secure and almost honorable in the enjoyment of the proceeds of their wickedness by the working of what we call "law and order." We see in the enjoyment of domestic peace, full of days and rich in public esteem, men whom well-attested but carefully hushed-up tales represent as the misleaders of women that died years ago in agony and shame. We see those in whom we once confided, and whom we still love fall under the influence of such vices as intemperance and prodigality, and pass, at first by slow steps, and then by rapid strides, into brutish debasement, or unprincipled swindling ; for vice, in its workings on a noble soul is like a fire,—at first slow to kindle, but in the end swift to consume. Then, on the other hand, we see, especially in large cities, multitudes whose childhood has been passed in the midst of profanity and crime, and who would seem to have grown up naturally vicious, because vice and dirt being parts of their daily surroundings, they have taken no trouble to avoid either, but rather have rejoiced in both. Now consider all that you have seen, during

your life-time, in the way of such moral puzzles in the world around you ;—I have only stated a few of the most obvious of those puzzles : and then indicate, if you can, some general principle on which the good and the evil shall be distinguished and separated after death. In other words, let us have some rule of judgment dictated by natural religion."

"Well," said Mr. Tracy, after some reflection, "a man's intention to do his duty is the main thing ; and such an intention should absolve him from the consequences of his errors, or failings, or even occasional acts of vice growing out of sudden temptation."

"In reply to that," rejoined Mr. Walton, "I would say that if good intentions must excuse errors, failings, and sudden falls into vice, as you say they should do, you will certainly find it impossible to draw a satisfactory line of separation between good men and bad men. We all not only intend, in the abstract, to do well, but as a matter of fact really carry out those intentions, unless when a greater or less influence of our passions misleads us. With most men intentions, or plans of life, grow weaker, whilst propensities, or habits of life, good or bad, become stronger, as they advance in years. Your rule simply amounts to this, that the man who wishes

to secure a happy life beyond the grave must not yield too much to his passions. That is certainly very vague. Besides each act of vice corrupts us and makes virtue thereafter more difficult. We still may have good intentions, but we have a lower standard of duty ; and, in fine, he who begins to wander is often lost before he is ready to admit his serious danger. Take as an illustration the case of a man who has proved a defaulter in a position of trust. He did not begin that career of practical fraud with the intention of wronging any one. He was high-souled at that day ; but he was also needy, because his expenses, which he could not reduce without impairing, as he supposed, his social position, were beyond his actual means. He earnestly desired therefore the ability to live in a more open-handed way. Perhaps he even persuaded himself that he would make a noble use of the wealth which he purposed to acquire suddenly, when in an hour of infatuation, he absorbed in his own speculative undertakings the funds that others had intrusted to him for safe-keeping. So with what he considered at least excusable intentions he did a wrong thing. Conscience made a noble protest against that first wrong thing. She called his professed intentions deceivers and a great many other hard names ; but he silenced

her and told her to come at a more convenient season. She did return when he first came to grief in his speculations ; and she then told him plainly, that although the thing which he had already done was shamefully bad, yet the best thing that he could do, at this time of his first disappointment, was to confess to his principals and thus secure a return to honest ways. But he gruffly told her that going on had become a necessity and that he was utterly unwilling to disgrace himself prematurely, on account of what had been, he admitted, a foolish mistake, 'but then,' he added, 'my intentions certainly were not evil. Therefore I shall financier a little more, before I abandon hope,' said the poor, deluded man, 'and I must frankly say to you, my good conscience, that whilst things are in such a terrible state of suspense, I cannot afford to listen to your scruples about the means by which I shall keep afloat.' So conscience was again silenced ; and being in bad spirits, she took a composing draught and went asleep. When she awoke it was too late. Every thing had gone wrong. The wrong-doer had been exposed ; and he in a paroxysm of despair told her that she, conscience, had failed to stop him at the outset and that her name hereafter should be changed to remorse ; that she had become his

most noisy and vindictive persecutor ; and that to escape her cruel invectives, he should plunge into debauchery and excess. So much for the man who began in speculation and ended in fraud. The histories of men and women, who have declined from virtue into licentiousness are almost always remarkable for the absence of evil intentions, with which they aver that they began their sad careers. If we were discussing on the grounds of Scripture,—which we are not, but on those of natural religion—I should add that Eve herself had a certain good intention of becoming wiser by the taste of the forbidden fruit. And as for fanatical persecutors, in all ages of the world, it is notorious that they have boasted not only absence of evil in their intentions, when they persecuted, but positive intentions of the highest good towards their unhappy victims."

"But," interrupted Mr. Tracy, "why do you not say something of those who have not obviously deceived themselves as to their intentions, —in other words, of those who are eminently good citizens in every sense, not merely inoffensive to others, but positively useful members of society? You ought to allow that in such persons good intentions produce good fruits and that they at least may expect a happy condition after death."

"In regard to such," rejoined Mr. Walton, "I endeavour to be quite as hopeful as you probably will be when you have sifted their cases. The class of which you have just spoken, comprises a good many men and a large number of women, in regard to whom all that we really know is their respectability, or in other words the fact that none of them commit any overt acts of wickedness, and that some of them live in such a way as to do, either accidentally or intentionally,—(it is often hard to say which)—a considerable amount of good to others. In reality, perhaps most of them are simply of the number of those whom other men praise, because they have been successful, or, in other words, have done well unto themselves. Has it never occurred to you that what we call civilization implies a certain proportion in a community of such obviously good citizens, such well-intentioned and practically useful men and women, who shall employ the mass of the people, that is to say the poor, and afford them examples of the good effects of industry and talent combined? In respect to intention of doing their whole duty in life, this limited class is probably not more conscientious than the many who look up to them, and whom it is their acknowledged interest, as well as their duty, to help daily in various ways. Such virtue

on the part of the well-to-do, or prosperous class, brings its own reward in this life. It is gain and not godliness. It abounds in certain good works towards the many, in order that the many may co-operate in sustaining that social order, without which the few, whom success in life has placed in a position of leadership, would have small chance of deriving any good from that position. For we find also in civilized society, first a certain proportion of criminals, or persons of positively evil intentions, and secondly what one may call accidentally vicious people, that is to say persons of doubtful morals, persons in effect without any fixed principles. A great increase, in any community, of these last classes destroys civilization, and brings back licentiousness, anarchy and barbarism. Now you assume that all those men and women, whom a healthy state of civilization has caused to lead eminently reputable lives, are on the way to reward after death. I do not at all see why it should be so. Most of them, as I just now said, have their reward here. They aim, as a general thing, at respectability in this world; and they generally get what they seek. I do not mean that they attain all the wealth, or social position, or commercial standing, or professional reputation, or personal popularity, which they severally covet (to all

men this world is, more or less, a world of disappointment); but after all, most men get in the long run, as much as they have any right to expect, considering the competition into which they adventure themselves, when they struggle for such things. They cannot struggle effectually without practising a certain kind of self-denial, or, in other words, without having what you call good intentions. Such self-denial, or abstinence from indulgences that would interfere with the kind of respectability which they covet, is a necessity of life for them, just as a certain average amount of industry and frugality is a necessary virtue for the mass of the poor, of whom we know nothing but the fact that they are poor, and that they cannot subsist without the exercise of industry and frugality. But these several kinds of virtue, which the very constitution of civilized society enforces on its upper and lower classes respectively, are social virtues, or virtues of classes, rather than moral virtues, or virtues of individuals. The individual may be eminent for the virtue appropriate to his class, and yet almost destitute of that proper personal virtue, which is a moral quality."

"Not quite so fast, if you please:" interposed Mr. Tracy. "Your present position commands a large part of my defences; and I shall not re-

treat, until you have established yourself, in spite of me, on this very ground of class-virtue as different from personal virtue."

"I am quite obliged to you for the interruption:" replied Mr. Walton. "It has suggested a most excellent illustration of the difference between class-virtue and personal virtue. That illustration is found to perfection in an army, which cannot be effective without discipline in the rank and file, or without capacity and conduct on the part of the officers. Such terms as 'good soldier,' or 'good officer,' are therefore considered as indicative of class-virtue, and altogether irrelevant to the personal character of the individual to whom either of them may be applied. We know, in fact, that very good armies have often been made up to a great extent of singularly depraved men; but then the leaders of such effective forces always know how to command their troops and to care for them during a campaign, and the mass know how to obey in battle and to confide in a commissary department, which has always been equal to the exigencies of the hardest marches. As with a well-constituted army, so is it with a community, under what is called a high state of civilization. The poor, the great mass, are highly disciplined for daily toil. They are industrious and frugal;

but this social virtue is not, of itself, evidence that any individual of that class is personally virtuous. And in like manner your excellent officers of civilization, your eminently good citizens—persons more or less above the mass—whom you value so highly because of their self-denial, their good intentions, their reputable lives, cannot as a class maintain their position of leadership in this life, without that very self-denial which you consider rewardable after death. Do not understand me as saying that all of them confine their thoughts to things of this world, that all of them seek primarily good for themselves only, that none of them live as under the eye of the Judge of all. I have very great hopes of the good estate for judgment of many of those men and women whom you consider persons of eminently good intentions, and whom I should designate as belonging to the higher classes of a state of civilization. Permit me to add that I have still greater confidence that it shall be well with great numbers of those poor, of whom I just now said, that industry and frugality are virtues enforced on them, as a class, by their poverty. 'Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God!' which certainly implies that the advantage for true virtue is, beyond all comparison, with the poor rather than with the

prosperous. But I have wandered into a quotation from Scripture, (which we had agreed to lay aside,) and must return without delay to natural religion and to your respectable people, of whom, as a class, it certainly is true that sometimes primarily, sometimes incidentally, but almost always mainly, they seek their own good; that their kindly sense of the brotherhood of man, outside of their own family-circle, is small; and that efforts, by painful, personal self-denial, to do good to others than themselves and their own flesh and blood, occupy but little of their time and thoughts. One may go further and say, without any breach of charity, that the heartlessness, the unmercifulness of men and women, who have prospered and who are therefore honored, towards other men and women, who have fallen into poverty or vice, is often somewhat astounding. The sum of the whole matter amounts to what I said at the outset of your declaration of the rewardableness of good intentions. I then told you that all men intend, in the abstract, to do well, that is, to lead moral lives, and that they really perform their intentions, except when they are misled by a greater or less influence of their passions. Those whom you designate well-intentioned have enough power over themselves to control their

passions. Their motives for so doing may be simply selfish—of this earth, earthly—and therefore not worthy of reward after death: or they may be the contrary. And here I ought to add, that some of those who in this world bear the reproach of open vice have been sorely tempted at the outset of life, or at some sharp turn on its road; whilst some of those, who have preserved outward virtue, have always been singularly shielded from snares of evil. I therefore decline to allow that you can separate mankind into two classes, one good and the other evil, on the ground of intention to do duty in some, and the absence of such intention in others. To be frank: is your rule of separation satisfactory to yourself?"

"I confess," said Mr. Tracy, "that careful consideration, such as I have given whilst you were talking just now, has made the puzzles and perplexities of this world, under the light of reason or nature, greater than I had ever before supposed them to be. Now you appear to hold as to the teachings of Scripture, about the rule of judgment, views somewhat different from orthodox doctrine, as I understand it. Will you please explain what you find in Scripture on that subject?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Walton. "To do

so clearly, I must however first tell you, that in my view the Scriptures designedly give us the least possible information as to what shall be the rule of judgment in respect to any and all other persons than the limited number whom the gospel practically reaches. They tell us not how men in general shall be judged, but how we ourselves in particular, who confessedly know the truth, shall be dealt with at the last day. Some very zealous persons will assure you that every man, woman, or child of understanding, born in a nominally Christian country, is held therefor to the strictest accountability; that all, who are so born, may understand the gospel if they will; and that their neglect to hear or read, mark and understand, from whatever cause it may proceed, is their own fault, without excuse, at the peril of their souls. In effect, as ignorance of the law excuses no man, according to an old maxim of the lawyers, so neither does ignorance of the gospel excuse any man, according to the dictum of these evangelical levellers. I call them levellers, because in truth many of them, when pressed in argument, go so far as virtually to place under the scriptural rule of judgment even the heathen who have never heard of Christ. And yet, if we interpret with reasonable fairness the account which

the Lord himself gave of His own principles of judgment at the last day, we shall be constrained to admit that it is simply an account of the way in which He will judge those who certainly have known Him and probably have professed His service and called Him Lord whilst they were on earth. That account fills the whole of the twenty-fifth Chapter of St. Matthew: and if you read it carefully, you will find that it holds your soul accountable for what you know of the requirements of the Lord Christ, and that it does not gratify your curiosity, if you unhappily have any, as to what shall be His rule of judgment towards others, who either know Him imperfectly, or else know Him not at all. It opens with the parable of the Virgins: and that parable teaches us, that no one can be ready for the coming of the Lord, unless he carefully prepares himself in advance of the hour of call. There must be a store of oil laid up, during the day, or active period of life: otherwise the lamp will go out at the moment most critical, at the moment when the midnight-call is heard, arousing all to come forward, either for entrance to or exclusion from the great house. When that store has been provided, the call may be tranquilly awaited; for the well-supplied lamp ensures entrance, and all who shall enter must needs

partake of the marriage-festivities. But the door will be shut against those who have not made provision and yet have tranquilly awaited the call that must needs reveal the slothfulness of their service. I say slothfulness, because their own common sense must have suggested to them during day-light that a store of oil should be got ready for the night; and the implication of the parable is that there was a positive command, which they disregarded, to make all necessary provision. Now in this parable, as it seems to me, Christ warned His followers that they were not to drift through this life towards His judgment-seat, with what you call good intentions, getting along the best way they could with their natural dispositions and propensities, and shirking that careful, earnest regard for His coming to judgment, which the Scriptures inculcate as a vital element in the character of a Christian. Without such regard to judgment, without the sensitiveness which it produces about our duty, as that duty is laid down by Christ himself, and not as it is dictated by our own vague, natural notions of right and wrong, our consciences are not to be relied on. They are lamps indeed: but like all other lamps, they burn out in the hands of those who do not feed them. So much for the Lord's illustration by the case of the vir-

gins. He then passes into the parable of the talents, which is intended to intensify the conviction that service of a life-time to an absent Lord is our calling. We must not dream that He is only what is sometimes called a Lord paramount,—one to whom we owe homage, acknowledgments of duty and service of certain kinds, and such like indications that we hold for ourselves, under Him, as our liege-lord, on certain conditions. On the contrary, His teaching is that He is absolute owner of all; that He purposes to be absent for a season, or indefinite period; that He remembers perfectly what He entrusted to each one, at the time when He furnished us severally with His treasures, which we commonly call our faculties for this life; and that He will rigidly require what we ought to accomplish with those faculties, or in other words, will require His own with usury. Then parable is dropped; and the Judge himself gives of the principles of His future judgment the fullest and clearest account which the Scriptures contain. If I read aright that concise narrative of the coming of the Son of Man, it is a fearful warning against selfishness and unmercifulness which He teaches us that His true followers necessarily put aside, because they obey His golden rules of life, and into which His

false disciples necessarily harden themselves, because they fashion their lives in disregard of the word, that declares it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is remarkable that as both classes of virgins—foolish and wise—tranquilly awaited the coming of the bride-groom, slumbering, all of them alike, as the end drew near, in confidence of being ready, so the blessed and the cursed of the great judgment went through life, the former doing service to the Lord, without thought of His special regard for that service, and therefore saying at the end of each day: 'We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do:' the latter unwilling and therefore unable to believe, that life was to be spent in the care of those whom the Sovereign Ruler had placed around them to be helped. It thus appears that the Judge taught those who in due-time should stand before His judgment-seat, that all of them, evil and good alike, with full knowledge—indeed I may say making full acknowledgment—of His sovereignty, should pass on their several ways towards that judgment-seat doing duty, as they understood it. Only the evil would understand duty to be provision for themselves, whilst the good would understand it to be provision for others. Intent on their own selfishness, the evil would not

see the features of the Lord in the pining faces of the sufferers who should cross their path. Intent on daily, pressing, unselfish work, the good would not recognize the smile of the Lord on the pallid lips that should bless them. Both classes would be busy, too busy to note curiously such indications of the real character of their daily actions. The unmerciful man, when judged, would be astonished to hear that in neglecting the poor and helpless he had neglected Christ, just as Saul of Tarsus, when blinded by heavenly light on the road to Damascus, was astonished to learn that in persecuting Christians he had persecuted the Lord of transcendent glory. The unselfish man, when accepted, would be astonished to hear the declaration, that what he had regarded as simply a daily duty in the name of common humanity, was really in intention and purpose entertainment of the Son of Man, just as two sad and humble men, who once constrained a devout traveller to abide with them at Emmaus, were astonished by His transfiguration, as they sat together at meat. But the miraculous enlightenment which, if the Lord had chosen, might have been afforded, during this life, to both good and evil, would be afforded to neither class. To us this may seem strange and terrible: but it really is much more strange and terrible

that Christ assumes, in His description of judgment, and I may say, absolutely prophecies, that the evil amongst his hearers will offer at His judgment-seat a plea of good intentions, which He declares in advance shall avail them nothing. That plea will assert that they had always been ready to minister to Him, but that they had never had reason to suppose that He needed help at their hands. And thus their self-deception during life, and their feigned excuse in the day of judgment will certainly recall to his lips those fatal words of which he had forewarned them: 'Verily, I say unto you; inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.'"

"Well," replied Mr. Tracy, smiling, "I have been interested in your exposition of the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, but I cannot say that you have at all solved my difficulties. I consider life under the gospel of Christ, as you have described it, by paraphrasing that twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, *a hard thing*, unreasonably full of the most fearful risk for men and women naturally selfish, (as we all are,) and predisposed to self-deception by the very power of many of our natural affections. To that power of natural affections, which is strongest at the outset of life, is added also the enslaving

force of habit, as we advance in years. How can any one emancipate himself from such fetters, turn his back on himself and his worldly interests, and seek out service for Christ daily? How can I regard it as reasonable that such a rising above my natural inclinations should be laid on me as a daily duty throughout life? If I fail to perform that duty, I am under this view of the case, irremediably ruined. Is it not bitter mockery to speak of *the privilege* of knowing the gospel to a weak, tempted man, who is much more likely to be undone by neglect of that knowledge, than to be saved by a life modelled upon it? This is a busy world. It makes a deafening roar around me; that roar drowns the voice of Christ; I therefore do not hear His voice plainly; perhaps I grow weary of the constant effort of listening to catch His words; then I become careless as to His commandments and selfish in my purposes and plans; time rolls on, death comes, and after death comes judgment, which passes upon me to final perdition. I cannot see the mercifulness of such a gospel."

"Your complaint would have at least the semblance of reasonableness," replied Mr. Walton: "indeed," he added, "I could hardly refrain from sharing and expressing your views, if it were not for a certain great fact, which I con-

sider the vital thing in Christianity, of which, however, you have altogether failed to take account in your summary of the position of a man —such as either of us for example—who is responsible for the knowledge of the gospel. That fact is the actual life, death and resurrection of the Lord Christ for our sakes. He who partly by parables and partly by plain speech, (hard sayings, you think,) warned certain Jews nearly two thousand years ago against self-deception in regard to the principles on which He should judge them at the last day, was at that very time distant but a few hours' journey from the cross. In His account of the setting of the judgment, He portrayed Himself as "THE KING." What sort of a kingly life had He led in their eyes? He was the Son of God, come down to earth, to place men in the way of salvation. Did He first show Himself to His adopted brethren, of full age and stature, in the physical and mental perfection of manhood, in the luxury of robe and dwelling, and with the stately style of attendance which kings affect? Did He simply prescribe golden rules from a throne of peaceful dignity, and then forsake the earth, leaving upon the souls of all His hearers the responsibility of living under those rules as the standard for eternal judgment? If He had

done so, the gospel would have been very much what you consider it—a dispensation most doubtful as to its mercifulness. It would have brought the light of knowledge to condemn us, without any corresponding warmth of love to attract us. It would have been the law of the ten commandments expanded, intensified, and made far more difficult on account of such expansion and intension, and all the less attractive on account of such increased difficulty. The tables which Moses deposited in the ark of God were engraven with prohibitions of wrong-doing. The words with which they abounded were, 'Thou shalt not:' and under them, as a prohibitory law, human life had abounded in infractions of that law. They had convinced of sin nearly forty generations of Hebrews, who had filled up the interval between the days of Moses and the days of Christ: but consciousness of guilt is not necessarily followed by moral power for improvement, and in point of fact, those forty generations, which lived and died under the law in the holy land, did very much the same deeds as their fathers, who broke the law under the very shadow of Mount Sinai, wandered forty years, under the leadership of Moses, in the wilderness, and died there in their sins. It was therefore impossible that the generation of the days

of our Lord should covet mere increase of knowledge of duty. How could the men of those days, and the inheritors of their knowledge to the end of time welcome such a fearful additional responsibility as the performance, on the peril of the soul, of positive good to others, under precepts however golden, of love, disinterestedness, meekness, forgiveness and such like manifestations of heavenly temper? If, therefore, Christ had done for us nothing more than revealing to us the extent of our duty, He would simply have made our despair complete. We should have seen no possibility of escape at the judgment which He should hold, and which He himself portrayed. But He, who immediately before the last supper delineated the principles on which He should judge His hearers, sat afterwards among the twelve at that supper as one that served. He had, as Paul expresses it, made Himself of no reputation, from the very beginning of His earthly life. He had been an infant, as helpless as all other infants; a child, subject to disappointment of innocent childish wishes—for He was a poor child—and throughout childhood and youth He endured the reproach which must have attended spotless goodness in a town proverbially reprobate. Then came thirty years of age to the man Christ Jesus, with the experi-

ence in the wilderness, that through suffering, without the use of miracle to relieve Himself of any part of that suffering, He was to redeem mankind. The tempter endeavored to persuade Him to be content with something less than actual participation of all the physical consequences to which sin had made flesh and blood subject. We cannot—nay, in my opinion, we dare not—say that He might not, without sin, have converted stones into bread for His hunger; nor that He might not, without sin, have cast Himself down from the temple before the multitude of the Jews, and then have withdrawn gloriously to heaven, leaving them inexcusable for disregard of whatever commandments He chose to add, with His own lips, before He left the earth. But, on the other hand, we are quite sure that such use of His miraculous powers would have been an abandonment of us,—of all mankind who, before His day, had descended to the place of the departed, and of all who, thereafter, should pass into the realm of death. In the very hour of His eating such bread in the wilderness, he would have ceased to be our brother; He would have ceased to be capable of redeeming us, for our redemption was to be accomplished by His likeness to us in all things that are miserable and not sinful; and it could

not, so far as we are informed, have been accomplished in any other way. That hunger in the wilderness—a raging hunger setting in suddenly, at the end of forty days' miraculous abstinence from food—was but a small part of what He endured, until He offered himself on the cross. How can we portray adequately the sublime self-sacrifice involved in the life of one altogether spotless, whose best companions were a dozen men of narrow prejudices and imperfect piety; whose works of healing were often repaid with scanty thanks; whose hearers in the city were crafty rulers, seeking His life and a mob ready to do the accursed thing, which those rulers declared should be for the good of the nation, whilst His followers in the wilderness were an idle multitude, debased under the provincial despotism of Rome, and desiring to live evermore on that bread, which His miraculous power could multiply at pleasure? But why speak of His life? His death was the amazing thing. Not the mere physical suffering of the crucifixion, but that agony of the garden, in anticipation of the cup in which He should drink the bitterness of death; that darkness of soul, in which He cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' that joyless, untriumphant 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my

spirit!' Oh! my friend, you and I have heard, —we have ourselves known,—cases in which immortal life seemed to shine around a death-bed. And if we were to suppose that the unhesitating confidence of such dying men and women, in our day, might be the result of self-deception, (and it may be so in some cases, for our own confidence is not justification, but He that judgeth us is the Lord,) yet at all events it is certain, that whilst the Lord said of His own death, 'How am I straitened until it be accomplished!' His apostle Paul exclaimed joyously, 'I have kept the faith! Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness:' and Peter, in prospect of speedy decease, spoke of himself as a 'partaker of the glory that shall be revealed;' and John cried out, on the promise of His speedy coming, 'Even so; come, Lord Jesus.' All of these looked upon death as upon the face of one who should release them from prison; but He, the Captain of man's salvation, was overwhelmed to the last with misery and gall, for the sins of the whole world were laid on Him, and darkness which might be felt, darkness that thickened until it knew no light, encompassed His soul. He, at the end of all this woe, which we can but dimly conceive, gasped out, as in utter exhaustion of spirit, 'It is fin-

ished.' No song of victory, no shout of exultation proceeded from His lips. Crushed and bruised, through the offering of His soul for sin, in such a travail as it pleased the Father to ordain, for the ransom of the world from death, He passed into the regions of the departed, and abode there many hours, ordering His kingdom therein, and doing work—we may lawfully suppose—which concerned our salvation, though it be not given to us to know in what that work consisted. And on the third day He arose from the dead. He had led captivity captive, and was about to give gifts unto men. The work, for which He had so greatly humbled Himself—the work of man's redemption—had been wholly accomplished. He had trodden the wine-press alone; His own arm had brought salvation; His righteousness had sustained Him, and the year of His redeemed had come; for He had ransomed them from the place of the departed, and was ready to proclaim Himself the plague of death and the destroyer of the grave. So Christ lived and died and rose and revived, or lived again, Lord of the living and dead, highly exalted in heavenly places, because He bears that name of Jesus, or SAVIOUR, which is above every name, and at which every knee shall bow in heaven and in earth and under the earth. And

yet He virtually still abides on earth amongst those to whom His word has been transmitted ; for the Holy Ghost, whom the Father sends in His name, portrays Him to our mental eyes so that He seems to regard us tenderly, as once He beheld a certain young ruler, whom He commanded to renounce every thing for His sake, but mercy and the love of God. We cannot question His right thus to call upon us to take up the cross, nor our obligation to follow Him unreservedly ; for at such times of pure and true light His life of love, His death of agony, His resurrection in glory, His authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man, are to our minds portentous facts, and we have no inclination to dispute them. We therefore give to the winds the philosophic conception that He is chiefly an example of transcendent virtue, a human model which we ought indeed to copy in this world, but not under any severe stress of apprehension about the world to come. On the contrary, we are quite sure that the very life of our souls is at stake ; that sin is indeed a living death ; that its shadows are thickening around us, and that none other than He can deliver us ; that His life and death have already reconciled God to us, and that what remains is that we be

reconciled to God. Thus Christ Jesus apprehends or lays hold of us, that we may apprehend or take hold of eternal life. If we persistently refuse, our own hearts shall, in due time, assure us that we are self-excluded from His kingdom. It is an affair personal between my soul and Him, that He has so dealt with me more than once, and that I am therefore without excuse for unbelief. I know nothing of your interior life, but I sincerely hope that whensoever the time of your visitation by His presence shall come, you may be more willing than I have been in the days of His power on my soul. In conclusion, permit me to repeat, emphatically, that we are utterly uninformed as to His rule of judgment in respect to those whom He does not visit during their time on earth ; but we are quite sure that the Judge of all the earth shall do right, and we are equally sure that the souls of unenlightened multitudes are precious in the sight of Him who taught His disciples that He was ready to go into the wilderness and seek a single sheep that was lost."

"Well, indeed," replied Mr. Tracy, "this is new, very new as a whole, although such reflections in part have come up in my mind before. I will endeavor to get a better idea of that kind

of life to which Paul said he was constrained by the love of Christ. We are almost at the end of our drive. Here is the town to which I promised to take you."